SECRET

[redacted]

"Eyes Only for President and Secretary of State.

Whatever estimate I had formed of the political situation in Britain when I left here six days ago has been altered by what has occurred during my absence.

The Prime Minister is under heavy attack. On Monday next he must make the most difficult speech, followed by interrogation, of his long career in the House of Commons.

It is evident, although I must interpose the caveat that a foreigner is a mediocre judge of British behavior, that in six days the standing of the Prime Minister has undergone a marked diminution. The reasons are not difficult to define.

In the Profumo case, the continuance of that now ruined man in Cabinet office, and his solemn denial to the House of any physical intimacy with Miss Christine Keeler, has given weight to alternative charges against the Prime Minister (1) that he was in collusion with Profumo in the telling of a palpable lie, or (2) that through naivete or stupidity, as well as because of an indolent disregard, or neglect, of the warnings of British Security services he took a personal assertion of innocence as an accepted fact. The counter argumen t of uncritical reliance on the word of a colleague and friend is of little public avail in this connection.

I think few people believe that Macmillan, whose private integrity has not been questioned, would have connived at a clumsy attempt to avoid an almost inevitable disclosure, if he had known that Profumo had lied. Nor would it consort with the character of the PM to have done so.

The second charge is more serious. We shall witness the defense against it on Monday. If his dissertation is presented in lofty and persuasive terms (in itself, under the circumstances, no mean feat), in the teeth of impending defections, through some Conservative abstentions in voting, and the certain negative of the opposition party, Macmillan should win through for the evening.

But, unfortunately, for him this would not be a tale that has been definitively told. The laws of libel and slander in the United Kingdom, particularly as affecting a case sub judice, are such that the truth trickles, instead of gushing forth.

No matter what tribunal or special committee may be appointed to review the security aspects of this affair, the UK people, their appetite for sensations already whetted by partial revelations, may reach, if subjected to further shocks, a determination to force out the existing head of Government. There are constitutional and traditional impediments to accomplishing this with celerity, but once confidence has been too greatly undermined in rulers, ways of dismissing them are usually devised.

In his vigil this weekend, I do not doubt that the PM will present a resourceful man, will draw up a brilliant brief for delivery to the Commons. But even if he gains a personal success, his former prestige will not increase, be of the inexorable impact of events, be beyond complete restoration.

[redacted]

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
DATE 26 JAN 1982
RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
ENDORSE EXISTING MARKINGS ☐
DECLASSIFIED X RELEASABLE X
RELEASE DENIED☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS 0

DECLASSIFIED

Democracies are as cruel as other systems of Government in attributing blame to their political leaders. A sacrifice is increasingly demanded here, and the appointed lamb for the altar is the Prime Minister, who must already have appreciated the sad truth that no ingratitude surpasses that of a democracy.

Meanwhile, the lurid details of the involvement of degraded personalities like Dr. Ward, Miss Keeler and other nymphs, fan the popular imagination, inciting both meretricious and wholesome indignation in the public, who feel betrayed by dereliction in official circles.

It is almost impossible, at present, to judge how deeply the moral instincts of the British people are involved. If the actualities concerned private individuals, I would guess that the condemnation now so manifest would later be largely directed toward any other phenomenal scandal. The adventures, or misadventures, of the principals in a recent famous case provided strong fare to newspaper readers, but except as an example of high jinks in high places, were not considered as threatening the national welfare. The esoteric distortions of the sexual impulses of a few self-indulgent, licentious people subjected them to the denunciation of their decent fellow citizens, but had little effect on the political scene.

This present situation is different. A twenty-one year old call girl, of easy and accommodating habits, has precipitated a political crisis. In what seems to have been an eclectic, genial and not disinterested response to admiration, desire, or good fellowship, extended impartially to white, black, and red; she has been the inspirator of the possible downfall of a Prime Minister.

It is ironical and sad that La Keeler, who was led by the sleazy Dr. Ward through London streets, harnessed to a dog collar, might occasion the demise of a Government. Her frank predilection for her "Hairy Chested Russian", her laments over her beloved Profumo who was less forthnate than her Lucky Jamaican lover, do not create the image of a sensitive individual.

No one suspects at worst the Prime Minister of other than gullibility, or stupidity. He must, however, bear the burden of leadership, and concomitant criticism and atonement.

His forensic performance next week will settle the immediate fate of himself and his Government. If he succeeds, he will have bought time, but that is probably all. Behind him, hovering in the wings, is the 1922 Committee. If the adverse word is spoken there, he will eventually be dethroned, dependent on their judgment as to whether he is an asset or liability to his party.

I would gamble that Macmillan, a man gifted with courage and resolution, will remain in office for the present, and, probably, for some months to come, unless to the already almost intolerable dereliction of one Cabinet associate, another is added.

DECLASSIFIED

DECLASSIFIED

It is impossible to foretell whether such will be the case. But the ubiquitous Keeler may supply the final element of an upright stateman's doom. It is commonly thought here that if another Cabinet member, in addition to Profumo, was the probable recipient of her favors, the Government as presently constituted could not survive.

The reticences of British law are such that gossip, even when well-founded, does not spill over into public print, except when substantiated through legal processes. It is rumored that ever ready Miss Keeler, whose memoirs are being purveyed each Sunday in News of the World did not deny her person to a second lusty Minister, whom she serviced during a nocturnal automobile excursion in Richmond Park. If such be true, or if, despite denial, the public believes it, the PM could scarcely survive this unkindest cut.

Moreover, other incidents in which she and Ward were involved, are everywhere speculated about. One prominent Englishman is said to have converted a large holding into cash, prepared for a precipitate move to foreign parts. The general impression in London newspaper circles is that there is a lot of sludge under the already exposed scum.

Meanwhile, Miss Keeler is being tempted with non-amatory offers to which she gives every indication of complacently yielding. Five thousand pounds a week has been proposed for her appearance in a night-club, and she has formed a company to deal with her film and other contracts. Rarely has a body promised such lucrative returns.

Until Dr. Ward, pimp, painter, bone cracker extraordinary, gives his dreaded testimony, the scenario will not be complete. When it is, it may reflect the squalid aspects of a few British public men, and not the excellent fundamental qualities of the great majority."

DECLASSIFIED